

5. BELLTOWN, GLENBROOK, SPRINGDALE

The Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhood grouping presents many of the opportunities and challenges of other older suburbs. With 23,100 people and a relatively small land area, it is one of the city's most populated neighborhood groupings. It is stable and largely built-out, with demographics that mirror those of the city. Located "in the middle" of Stamford, it is taxed in terms of traffic and use of its community facilities. Diversity, city beautiful, and quality of life recommendations are therefore closely related in this neighborhood – where every planning decision has an impact. The vision is to protect neighborhood stability, while providing opportunity for redevelopment that upgrades the neighborhoods' quality of life. Particular priority is placed on creating "village centers" at the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhood business districts.

Goal A:

Maintain and celebrate the diversity of Stamford's population and employment.

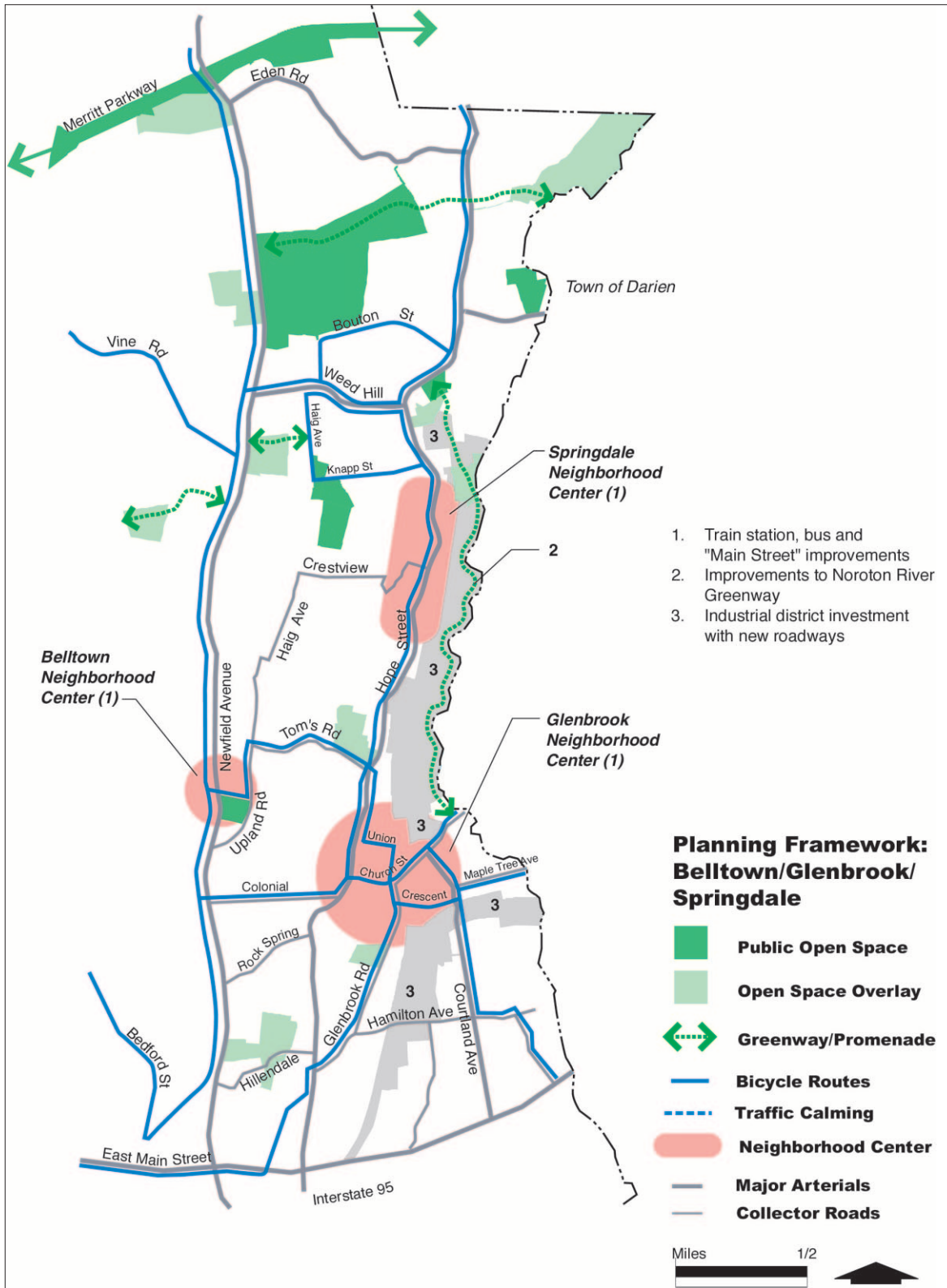
The Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhood grouping is demographically quite diverse. While incomes are relatively high (at a median of \$83,700 per household), roughly one-out-of-ten households earn under \$25,000 per year. While largely a single-family area, one-out-of-three housing units are rental. Both the age and racial/ethnic mix parallels that of the city as a whole.

The neighborhood grouping is also diverse economically. Nearly half of the city's industrially zoned land is located in two large swaths abutting the rail lines that cut through the neighborhoods.

Protecting this diversity is a paramount goal of the plan for the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhoods. But as part of this goal, it is important to arrive at strategies that make affordable housing and industry compatible with the prevailing low-density residential character of the neighborhoods.

Strategies:

5A1. Channel any higher-density housing to the (1) vicinity of the



Glenbrook and Springdale train stations, (2) Hope Street corridor, (3) Belltown business district, and (4) Newfield/Strawberry Hill Avenue corridor. These areas are convenient to one or more of the following: commuter train stations, bus service to Downtown, the Riverbend Center/Research Park employment center, shopping and services. This proximity reduces the dependence on cars for commuting and errands. Any high-density housing should be built in connection with one of the Design Districts (including PDD – Preservation and Design District), so as to assure a high standard of design that blends in with its neighborhood context. The complement of a policy to channel any higher-density housing to these areas is the policy to discourage it elsewhere in the neighborhoods.

5A2. Buy scattered apartments for affordable housing. Existing condominium townhouse and apartment buildings are located in the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhoods. The City's Affordable Housing Strategy foresees purchase of some of these units to make them available for affordable housing. Such a strategy is generally in lieu of building subsidized housing in these areas.

5A3. Continue the one-for-one replacement policy for all publicly supported housing; and strive to maintain the total inventory of other publicly assisted affordable housing. Should the redevelopment of the Housing Authority's Lawnhill Terrace or other properties ever come about, it should be contingent upon providing the same number of similarly priced and sized units within the neighborhood; replacement units for existing tenants; and the active participation of tenants and neighborhood residents in planning the new development and replacement strategy.

5A4. Apply inclusionary housing regulations to any large-scale residential subdivisions and development. Large-scale development will be rare – and rarer still if the Plan's environmental and other recommendations are carried out. However, subdivisions and developments of ten or more homes should include a reasonable set aside for affordable housing, as would be the case in all of the city's neighborhoods.



Opposite and above: Recommendations focus on reinforcing the residential quality of life, and creating several village-like centers.

5A5. Pursue R&D, eco-industrial park, and performance-based zoning in the industrial district from Camp Avenue to Research Drive just north of Glenbrook Road. This industrial district encompasses Riverbend Center – which in many parts and ways already achieves the high design and performance standard sought for many of Stamford's industrial districts. At its best, this industrial area features: (1) riverside open space and trails, (2) attractive buildings, (3) continuous north/south access through articulated roadway and parking lot drives, (4) landscaped parking lots, and (5) a mix of industry, low-density offices, and high-tech

operations. Additional, preferred standards and features would include: (1) involvement of the local residential community in planning, (2) daycare or other services shared with the local community, (3) use of solar and other environmentally sensitive technologies, (4) shared services, (5) shared parking, (6) street extensions and connections, (7) expansion of commercial and light industrial uses, and (8) environmental clean-up and water treatment (especially important given the concerns of the South Western Regional Planning Agency with regard to contamination of the Noroton River aquifer in this area). Higher office densities than the 50 percent cap on floor area ratio (FAR) should be linked to these improvements.

5A6. Promote industrial regulations and standards that make industry more compatible with its residential neighbors, as well as less likely to generate negative environmental impacts. The City should clarify the industrial zoning districts with special permits for higher-impact uses and higher design and performance standards in general. The City should restrict higher impact and heavy industrial uses within a reasonable distance of residential areas. A performance-based index should be adopted, to determine which industrial uses should be subject to special permits. Eco-industrial standards and linkages should be promoted. Urban design improvements should be pursued where industrial districts abut residential areas.

5A7. Upgrade the industrial district adjoining the railroad from the Turnpike to the Darien border. Some of the ideas to pursue include: (1) financial and technical assistance for improvements, tied to (2) shared parking and access and egress, including dedication of a right-of-way along the railroad to remove truck traffic from local residential streets, or (3) performance-based zoning and environmentally sensitive physical improvements to make the industry better neighbors with adjoining residential areas, and (4) clarification of the M-G (Manufacturing-General) and M-L (Manufacturing-Light) districts, with heavy industrial uses allowed only by Special Exception in the M-G districts.

Two major design goals need to be addressed in the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhood grouping.

The first is to promote infill development consistent in scale and character with the surrounding neighborhood. These neighborhoods are largely built out, with a defined design quality that needs to be protected. It varies from the straight, tree-lined streets between East Main Street and the rail line, to the winding streets of Springdale.

Goal B:

Pursue a new "City Beautiful" movement, celebrating and enhancing the city's main corridors, greenways, waterfront, hills, historic buildings, gateways, and especially the unique qualities of Stamford's neighborhoods.

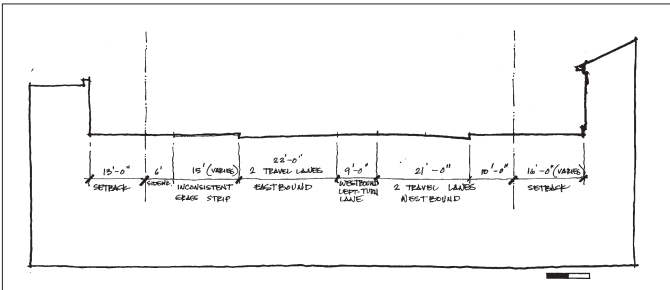
The second design goal is to upgrade the major roadways and small business districts that unite the neighborhoods, and which serve as the major destinations, whether for shopping, commuting or services. These include East Main Street, Newfield Avenue, and especially the Hope Street corridor (which includes two business districts and commuter train stations), in addition to the tiny Belltown business district.

Strategies:

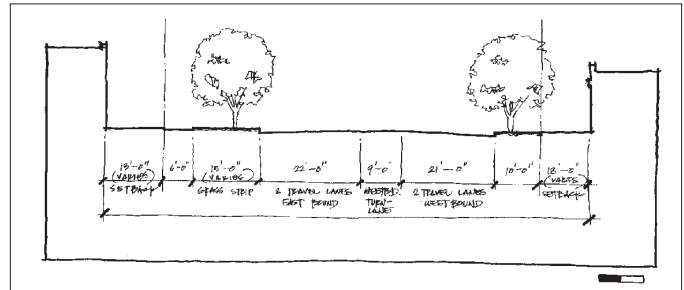
5B1. Promote contextual housing development. Wherever higher-density housing is built, it should be designed to be compatible with its environs, and consistent with design guidelines to be prepared by the Land Use Bureau and adopted by the Planning Board. The rules for small-scale development, for example, should promote: (1) reduced curb cuts, (2) meaningful landscaping, without asphalt in front, and (3) setbacks and scale consistent with those of adjoining development. In addition, the City should adopt controls on impervious materials through zoning or subdivision regulations to prevent extensive blacktopping. The City should also provide adequate parking requirements for multifamily development.

5B2. Over time, create a PDD (Preservation and Design District) for the Newfield Avenue corridor. The PDD should promote: (1) protection of historic and notable buildings, (2) preservation of front lawns, landscaping, stonewalls and old-growth trees, (3) parking lot landscaping, (4) buffers between residential and institutional uses, (5) burying of power lines, and (6) attractive bus shelters at major generators of activity (e.g., schools, houses of worship) as well as places convenient to concentrations of residents (e.g., at multifamily housing developments).

5B3. Over time, create a PDD (Preservation and Design District) for the East Main Street corridor. The PDD for East Main Street should reinforce the special role and identity of Main Street as one of the radial corridors that links to the pedestrian core of the Downtown. This corridor should be thought of as a comprehensive experience from the border of Darien. Effort should be made to (1) link the open spaces along the corridor; (2) articulate key intersections and gateways; (3) create visual and physical connections to important buildings; and (4) promote contextual development that is oriented towards the corridor and provides for transition in scale to adjacent neighborhoods. (The Urban Design report illustrates these strategies.) The PDD should also promote: (1) housing redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties, (2) smooth transitions between residential and commercial uses, (3) reduced number of curb cuts and shared parking for retail development, (4) more attractive design standards with regard to signage, landscaping and storefronts, (5) continuous, tree-lined sidewalks for the length of East Main Street, (6) burying of power lines, and (7) attractive bus shelters at key locations.



East Main Street existing conditions.



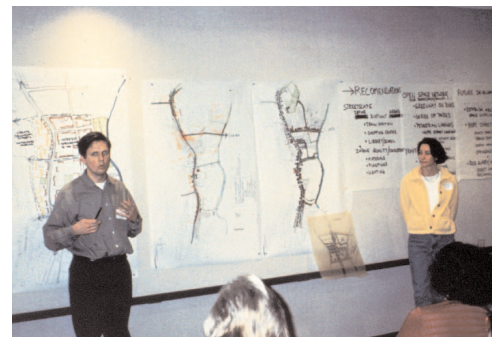
East Main Street proposed plan.

Once the new standards are in place, tax incentives can be employed to promote renovations and improvements that bring existing property into greater design compliance. This is an especially useful tool in commercial districts, where there is a turnover of stores and businesses. A PDD at this location would have special value in connection with a possible MetroNorth station here.

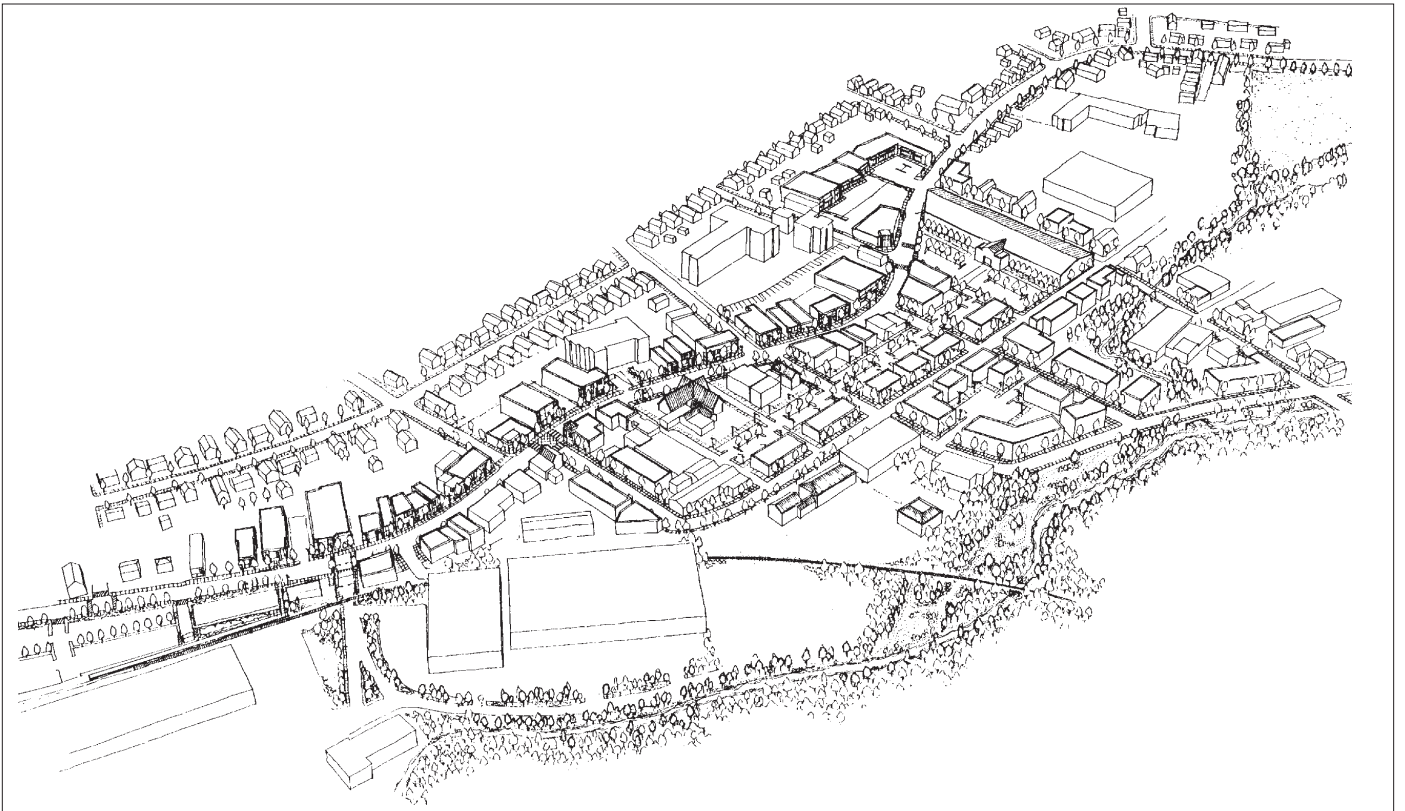
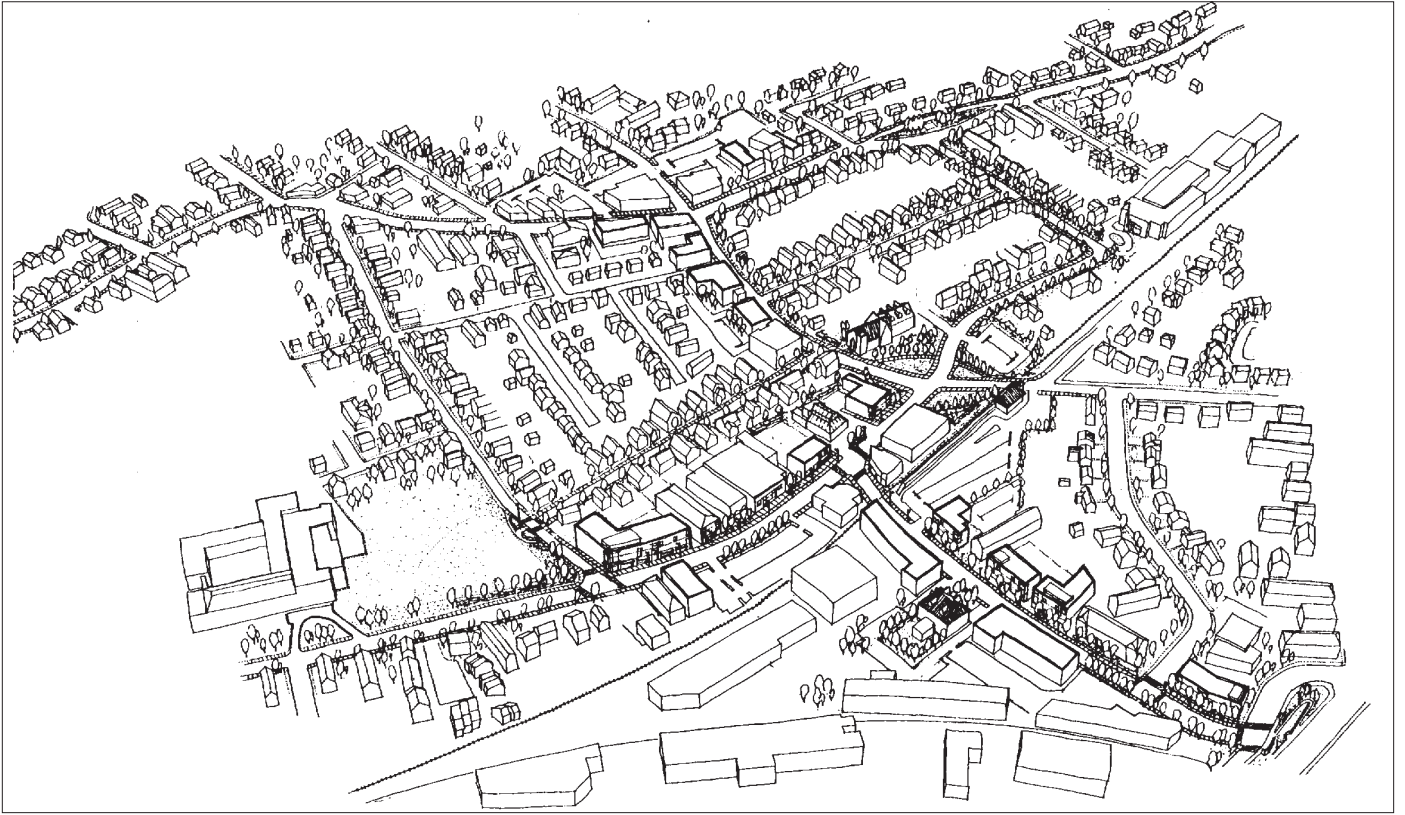
Above: On East Main Street, roadway and streetscape improvements can be coupled with new development to create a more attractive and productive corridor.

Opposite: A community design process for both Glenbrook (top) and Springdale (bottom) generated ideas for creating two village centers anchored by train stations and shopping.

5B4. Promote “Main Street” and transit-friendly development in the vicinity of the Glenbrook and Springdale train stations, and in the Belltown neighborhood business district. This would involve employment of either the PDD (Preservation and Design District) or MOD (Mixed-Use Overlay District) zoning tools. Either way, the plans should build on the intensive neighborhood workshops (“charrettes”) held in Glenbrook and Springdale and organized by the Regional Plan Association (RPA) in connection with this Master Plan, as well further engagement of neighborhood residents, civic associations, property owners and businesses. The RPA plans generically called for “town centers,” with (1) continuous sidewalks, street trees, pedestrian-scaled lighting and on-street parking along the main street itself, (2) easy pedestrian crossings and similar enhancements, (3) pocket parks and use of larger open spaces as “village greens,” (4) orientation of stores to the front sidewalk, (5) development of contextual and in-fill buildings, (6) rationalized and inter-con-



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nected parking lots behind stores, (7) shared parking among business uses, (8) opportunity for “upstairs living” as well as offices on upper floors, (9) façade, storefront and signage guidelines, (10) buried power lines, and (11) attractive bus shelters at key locations. It should be noted that once the PDD standards are in place, tax incentives can be employed to promote renovations and improvements that bring existing property into greater design compliance; this is an especially useful tool in commercial districts, where there is a turnover of stores and businesses.

Two issues dominated quality of life discussions in the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhoods: traffic and parks.

With regard to traffic, the neighborhood grouping suffers from the coincidence of two factors: (1) the use of its through streets for through-traffic between Downtown and other communities to the north, and (2) the growth in the number of automobiles per household over the past decades. There is no way to reduce the traffic volumes. But there are ways to mitigate the impact of traffic on safety, land use values, and quality of life; and conversely, to make walking a more realistic alternative to the automobile.

With regard to parks, the neighborhood grouping suffers from another coincidence of three factors: (1) the neighborhoods’ relative high population density, as suburban communities go, (2) the reliance on scattered school grounds for local recreation, and (3) the absence of major multi-use/multi-age-group park amenities. There is not enough land to create major new parks. This means that focus must be on maximizing latent resources (like the Noroton River corridor) and protecting existing resources (like school grounds).

Strategies:

5C1. Create transportation hubs at the Glenbrook and Springdale train stations. Each train station should be augmented with a sheltered bus stop, taxi/car service operation, bicycle racks, expanded parking, and pedestrian/commuter enhancements such as tree-lined paths to local roads, landscaped parking areas, clear signage, a heated indoor waiting area, a concierge service tied to local businesses, newsstand, possibly a café, and attractively designed buildings and landscaping.

5C2. Explore the possibility of a MetroNorth rail station at East Main Street. This rail station would serve Downtown as well as south Glenbrook residents. It would also spur new development in the immediate area.

5C3. Provide continuous sidewalks within walking distance of the train sta-

Goal C:

Protect and enhance the quality of life of Stamford’s neighborhoods, addressing land use transitions, community resources, traffic, and environmental conditions.



Pedestrian enhancements are called for along Hope Street and other roads.



tions. The areas to focus on are (1) the half-mile circumference of each train station, and (2) connections to the nearby business districts, office buildings and other places of employment, and apartment buildings.

5C4. Explore linkages to make community facilities even greater assets for the community. The Hope Street library, for example, should be retained and integrated in a shared parking and landscaping plan with the adjoining school and open space. The School Board should be encouraged to make its buildings available for after-school use by the community. A bus shelter should be provided at this location, as well.

5C5. Implement design guidelines for roads that create the edges of industrial districts. Interventions include rationalization of curb cuts and parking areas, aggressive landscaping to screen parking and loading areas, incentives for façade improvements, consolidation of exposed utilities, sidewalk and pedestrian improvements, and attractive gateways to industrial areas. The industrial edge corridors include portions of Hamilton Avenue and portions of Hope Street. (The Urban Design report illustrates these strategies.)

5C6. Undertake balanced roadway improvements. The purpose is to consider the land use impacts of different traffic conditions, as well as to provide better access to employment centers. A north/south road through the Riverbend Center/Research Park and adjoining industrial districts (to the north and south) should be created, to direct truck traffic away from Hope Street. Another truck route should be created along the railroad right-of-way from East Main Street to the Noroton River, to relieve truck traffic on local, residential roads. East Main Street should provide four lanes of traffic from Downtown to the border with Darien. However, this improvement should be coupled with safer crossings, street trees and other design elements that reflect an equal priority on pedestrians.

5C7. Incrementally use traffic calming to reduce traffic impacts on neighborhood roads. Residents participating in the Master Plan workshops highlighted problems on a number of residential streets. Since one street's traffic calming can be another street's traffic-inducing, there needs to be some consideration to easing congestion on other roads. Hope Street, though congested, should not be traffic-calmed, since it is the arterial spine for the neighborhood; but there should be a series of pedestrian improvements all along Hope Street, starting with the vicinity of the two train stations, two neighborhood business districts, and several confusing intersections. Also, the Omega Drive extension is intended to divert truck and commuter traffic from Hope Street. Strawberry Hill Avenue should also be widened slightly, to allow two lanes in each direction; this should be matched with sidewalk

and street tree amenities on Strawberry Hill Avenue — to maintain the residential quality of this thoroughfare.

5C8. Enhance existing parks and their connections to neighborhoods. The City should upgrade existing facilities. The City's *Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan* of 1997 put particular priority on pedestrian, playground and athletic field safety improvements.

5C9. Promote a greenway along the Noroton River. A variety of strategies can be employed: public acquisition, deed restrictions, easements, dedications, cooperation with private land trusts, cooperation with Darien, use of incentives, and use of new State legislation allowing the City to receive land area equal to 10 percent of a property's value, in connection with redevelopment applications. To the extent that open spaces can be linked, the City of Stamford and Town of Darien should promote and create walking and jogging trails through the greenway wherever practical. The highest priority should be on the portion of the greenway abutting the proposed R&D and eco-industrial park district.

5C10. Explore the potential for additional parks, playground and ball fields in the central part of the city. The central part of the city offers the greatest convenience to the greatest number of people; and Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale are relatively moderate density neighborhoods. While there are several small parks as well as schools with playfields and playgrounds, there are no large, general-purpose parks in the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale area. There is precious little land available for new parks, prompting creative solutions. As examples, the City could build playgrounds in presently passive woodlands at the east side of Hope Street between Howes Avenue and Frisbie Street, and/or Sleepy Hollow Park and/or Woodway Park, using Chestnut Hill Park (in North Stamford) as the model for design and community involvement. "Out of the box" ideas will need to be surfaced in order to deal with the simple fact that the most heavily-used recreational facilities will be in the center of Stamford, where there is the greatest convenience to the greatest number of people.

5C11. Designate school grounds as Open Space Overlay. Open Space Overlay would involve reduced theoretical development potential, consistent with the current use of such sites, and the fact that, in the central part of Stamford, school grounds are all important in terms of meeting the recreation and open space needs of residents. These lands must be retained as parkland should the school be closed or sold.



A river greenway, new parks and park improvements are a top priority.

Goal D:

Create a vibrant, seven-days-a-week, pedestrian-friendly Downtown focused both on the Transportation Center and the historic core area to its immediate north.

Most of the Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale neighborhood grouping is built out. Still, there is potential for redevelopment in the industrial districts and along several major roads, including East Main Street, Strawberry/Newfield Avenues, and Hope Street. Such development should be incremental in scale and density, so as not to compete with Downtown as the focus of most types of major development.

Strategies:

5D1. Retain the current floor area ratio (FAR) caps for office development in industrial districts, and for retail development, outside of Downtown. The 50 percent FAR cap on office uses should continue to be applied in industrial districts. So should the prohibition of retail development except for supermarkets (by special exception) and furniture establishments.

